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ABSTRACT

Vocational education research seeks to answer one form or another of a fundamental question: How can we best prepare youth and adults for today's workplace? Comprehensive national and international research programs typically attempt to ask and answer larger forms of that question. Recurring themes in the United States reflect change--what skills workers need for the changing workplace and what vocational education should provide them. In Europe and Australia, attention is focused more on the impact of research on policy, decision-making, and return on investment. Most other research focuses on the specifics of occupational areas in vocational education, including a focus on attitudes toward agricultural education and teaching strategies in business education. One recurring theme in research across all occupational areas is the call for further research, particularly research in cooperative education. Although quantitative methods still play a major role in research, other research approaches and methods are still being recommended, particularly action research, reflective practice, critical theory and critical research, and a complementary combination of qualitative and quantitative research on the returns to vocational education. Other approaches include Delphi survey, concept mapping, and context-input-process-product, although case studies are the most common. Questions for future vocational education research include exploring the reason for different research emphases and different themes in various countries. (An annotated bibliography contains 27 resources.) (KC)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

by Michael E. Wonacott

TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERT NO. 15 2000

Vocational Education Research Trends

Vocational education is a large and complex undertaking, with activities across many occupations and areas, at many levels, in many settings. Likewise, the body of vocational education research is large and complex, with a diffuse focus on topics ranging from the essential nature of vocational education and its role in society to the individual details of specific occupational programs. In the many strands it follows, however, vocational education research seeks to answer one form or another of a fundamental question: How can we *best* prepare youth and adults for the workplace of today? This ***Alert*** examines the different forms of that question vocational education research asks and the answers it provides.

Comprehensive national and international research programs typically attempt to ask and answer larger forms of that question. Recurring themes in the United States reflect change–what skills workers need for the changing workplace and how vocational education should provide them (National Center for Research in Vocational Education 1999). In Europe and Australia, attention is focused more on the impact of research on policy, decision making, and return on investment, although one European study called research in return on investment "sparse and underdeveloped" (Barrett et al. 1998).

For the most part, other research focuses on the specifics of occupational areas in vocational education. Noticeable examples include a focus on attitudes toward agricultural education and teaching strategies in business education. One recurring theme in research across occupational areas is the call for further research–particularly research in cooperative education, described as "sparse" (Bartkus and Stull 1997).

Although quantitative methods still play a major role in research (Rojewski 1997), other research approaches and methods are still being recommended, particularly action research, reflective practice, and critical theory/critical research. Barret et al. (1998) suggest a complementary combination of qualitative and quantitative research on the returns to vocational education and training. Looker and Dwyer (1998) recommend alternatives to the linear pathways research model for education-to-work transitions. Other approaches used include Delphi survey, concept mapping, context-input-process-product (CIPP), action research, and action reflection learning, but case studies were by far the most common.

Some questions arise in looking at recent vocational educational education research. Why do comprehensive research programs in the U.S., Europe, and Australia have different emphases? Does the somewhat different focus and schedule of occupation-related research merely reflect the different priorities–and place in the pipeline–of front-line practitioners? Why do different themes recur in the U.S., Europe, and Australia? Perhaps answers to such questions will come in future vocational education research.

Resources

Barrett, A.; Hovels, B.; Den Boer, P.; and Kraayvanger, G. ***Exploring the Returns to Continuing Vocational Training in Enterprises.*** Thessaloniki, Greece: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 1998. (ED 422 508)
Analyzes "sparse and underdeveloped" research on the returns of continuing vocational training in businesses reported in 21 publications.

Bartkus, K. R., and Stull, W. A. "Some Thoughts about Research in Cooperative Education." ***Journal of Cooperative Education*** 32, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 7-16. (EJ 542 262)
Surveys "sparse" cooperative education research and analyzes dissemination, graduate program, and practitioner issues. Recommends strategies for practitioners and associations, including the development of a definitive research agenda.

Bragg, D. D. ***Educator, Student, and Employer Priorities for Tech Prep Student Outcomes.*** Berkeley: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of California, 1997. (ED 404 474)
Used concept mapping to identify, classify, and prioritize student outcomes as rated by three stakeholder groups (educators, students, and employers).

Chin, P.; Munby, H.; and Hutchinson, N. L. "Co-operative Education: Challenges of Qualitative Research on Learning in the Workplace." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, Montreal, Quebec, April 19-23, 1999. (ED 430 023)
Reports on challenges in the interplay among theoretical framework, data collection, and data analysis in co-op workplace case study.

Connors, J. J., and Murphy, T. H. ***Creating the Future through Research. Proceedings of the 24th National Agricultural Education Research Meeting, Las Vegas, Nevada, December 10, 1997.*** (ED 414 479)
Recurring themes include attitudes toward and perceptions of agricultural education, status and content of teacher education programs, and learning styles. Proceedings of 1996 (ED 404 496), 1995 (ED 388 773), and earlier meetings also available.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. ***Vocational Education and Training: The European Research Field. Background Report. vol. I, 1st ed.*** Thessaloniki, Greece: ECDVT, 1998. (ED423 393) <www.cedefop.eu.int/>
Contains 12 papers on VET and related research developed for Tessaring (1998), including two on costs and benefits of VET.

Hayman, S.; MacKenzie, J.; Adams, H.; and Harris, L., eds. ***Vocational Education and Training Research Database, 1998.*** Leabrook, Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 1998. (ED 431 130) <www.ncver.edu.au/ncver.htm>
Four issues of a quarterly annotated bibliography from Australia's national VET database: VET research (no. 35); international information in VET (no. 36); VET and indigenous students (no. 37); and returns on investment in training (no. 38).

"Home Economics Research in Canada." ***Canadian Home Economics Journal*** 48, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 93-100. (EJ 574 883)
Abstracts of 16 papers presented at the 1998 Canadian Home Economics Association conference.

Huberty, C. J., and Petoskey, M. D. "Use of Multiple Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis." ***Journal of Vocational Education Research*** 24, no. 1 (1999): 15-43. (EJ 581 066)
Distinguishes between two analyses. Suggests information reporting methods; reviews use of regression methods with missing data.

Lakes, R. D., and Bettis, P. J. "Advancing Critical Vocational Educa-

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tion Research." ***Journal of Vocational Education Research*** 20, no. 3 (1995): 5-28. (EJ 515 625)
Suggests postpositivism as a way to understand the cultural context of work; identifies qualitative studies using critical theory; recommends critical research.

Lasonen, J., and Finch, C. R. "Evaluating an International Vocational Education Research Linkage." ***International Journal of Vocational Education and Training*** 3, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 51-71. (EJ 515 645)
Identified perceptions cultural collaboration, competencies, academic working style differences, and contribution of linkage to international collaboration.

Looker, E. D., and Dwyer, P. "Rethinking Research on the Education Transitions of Youth in the 1990s." ***Research in Post-Compulsory Education*** 3, no. 1 (1998): 5-23. (EJ 585 165)
Advocates alternative approaches (vocational focus, occupational focus, contextual focus, altered patterns, and mixed patterns) instead of a linear pathways model of research on education-to-work transitions.

National Center for Research in Vocational Education. ***The 1999 Agenda and Personnel Directory for the National Center for Research in Vocational Education.*** Berkeley: University of California, 1999. (ED 431 136) <http://vocserve.berkeley.edu/>
Research and development projects of the National Center for 1999. Outlines also available for 1998, 1997, 1996 (ED 398 414), 1995 (ED 384 802), and earlier years. Recurring themes include integration of academic/vocational education, tech prep/school-to-work, and educational and school reform.

Noll, C. L., and Graves, P. R. ***The Business Education Index, 1998.*** Little Rock, AR: Delta Pi Epsilon, 1999. (ED 431 882)
Latest in a series of annual publications indexing articles and research studies from selected publications. Indexes also available for 1997 (ED 414 980), 1996 (ED 411 420), 1995 (397 257), and earlier. School-to-work and technology education introduced as new categories in 1996.

Peterat, L."Linking the Practices of Home Economics and Action Research." (EJ 550 262) "Now You See It, Now You Don't: What Kind of Research is Action Research?" (EJ 550 263) ***Canadian Home Economics Journal*** 47, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 100-104, 119-123.
Advocates enriching understanding of home economics by action research approaches.

Proceedings: 1998 Delta Pi Epsilon National Conference. Little Rock, AR: Delta Pi Epsilon, 1998. (ED 424 361)
Contains 46 refereed research papers, refereed action research papers, and research training papers. Proceedings also available from 1996 (ED 411 400), 1994 (ED 377 393), and earlier years.

Pucel, D. J. "The New Vision of High School Vocational Education: Implications for Research." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Vocational Education Research Association, New Orleans, LA, December 11, 1998. (ED 428 276)
Suggests research needed on the purpose, student audience, design, content, teaching strategies, and evaluation of vocational education and roles for parents and academic and vocational teachers.

Ricks, F., and Mark, J. "I'm Not a Researcher But..." ***Journal of Cooperative Education*** 32, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 46-54. (EJ 542 266)
Relates research-practice and reflective practice models to integration of research and practice.

Robinson, C., and Thomson, P., eds. ***Readings in Australian Vocational Education and Training Research.*** Leabrook, Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 1998. (ED 422 525)
Synthesizes 12 areas of recent VET research in Australia, including returns to enterprises and impact of research on policy.

Rojewski, J. W. "Editorial: Past, Present, and Future Directions of JVER." ***Journal of Vocational Education Research*** 22, no. 3 (1997): 141-148. (EJ 553 343)
Reports analysis of 160 JVER articles from 1987-1996: two-thirds were quantitative; most frequent focuses were articulation/generalization and content areas.

Seyfried, E. ***Evaluation of Quality Aspects in Vocational Training Programmes.*** Thessaloniki, Greece: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 1998. (ED 425 331)
Used the CIPP model to review evaluations from five countries on vocational training program quality and identify a more coherent approach to program quality evaluation.

Smith, C. S.; Hawke, G.; McDonald, R.; and Smith, J. S. ***The Impact of Research on VET Decision Making.*** Leabrook, Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 1998. (ED 422 520)
Used literature review, symposium, semistructured telephone interviews, case studies, and background paper on international practice to examine impact.

Smith, M. G. "Sociological Research and Home Economics Education." ***Canadian Home Economics Journal*** 46, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 161-165. (EJ 535 312)
Examines functional analysis, systems theory, symbolic interaction, and critical theory/conflict analysis.

Sylvester, G. C. "Developing Research in New Zealand Polytechnics: A Sector in Change." ***Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*** 5, no. 1 (May 1997): 109-130. (EJ 545 610)
Describes action research by staff from four polytechnics to develop a research agenda.

Tessaring, M. ***Training for a Changing Society: A Report on Current Vocational Education and Training Research in Europe.*** Thessaloniki, Greece: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 1998.
Gives a comprehensive overview of VET research in Europe, including steering of VET systems, macro- and microeconomic costs and benefits of VET, proposals for curricular research, and aspects of comparative VET research.

Tomal, D. R. "Action Research for Technical Educators." ***ATEA Journal*** 4, no. 4 (April-May 1997): 6-7. (EJ 545 550)
Describes how action research model and techniques can be integrated into technical education curricula.

Weaver-Paquette, E. "Crystallization and Congruence: Implications of Cooperative Education Experiences upon the Career Development Process." ***Journal of Cooperative Education*** 32, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 63-69. (EJ 542 268)
Analyzes research on cooperative education and career development. Reports a need for additional study to examine the specific constructs of the career development process reported by career-determined and -undetermined students.

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